Use of

Influenza Rapid Diagnostic Tests







For research on diseases of poverty

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Contents

	Background	3
I.	What is influenza?	4
II.	How is influenza diagnosed?	6
III.	Why and how is influenza activity monitored?	8
IV.	Potential roles of rapid influenza diagnostic tests (RIDTs)	9
V.	How do rapid influenza diagnostic tests work?	. 11
VI.	How effectively do rapid tests detect influenza?	. 15
VII.	Deciding whether to use RIDTs and understanding what rapid test results mean	17
VIII.	What to consider before selecting an RIDT for purchase	. 21
IX.	Transporting and storing RIDTs	. 23
X.	Evaluating the quality of the testing programme	. 25
	 Box 1. Commercially available RIDTs advantages and disadvantages Box 2. Items to remember when using an RIDT Box 3. Factors influencing RIDT sensitivity Box 4. Information to request from RIDT manufacturers 	9 10 15 22
	Table 1. Summary of interpretation of RIDT results	17
	Figure 1. Diagnostic assays available in different laboratory settings Figure 2. Mode of action of common RIDT format	7 . 11
	Flowchart 1. Suspected outbreak of influenza in closed community / institution Flowchart 2. Transition from sporadic cases to widespread community	. 18
	transmission of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus	. 19
	Flowchart 3. Widespread community activity of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus	. 20
	Annex 1. Test sensitivity and specificity and the importance of prevalence	
	in the estimation of predictive value of diagnostic tests	. 26
	References	27

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Background

Seasonal and pandemic influenza pose ongoing risks to global human public health. The emergence of the novel influenza A(H1N1) 2009 virus in the human population has led to a global influenza pandemic. Influenza diagnostic tests which aid in case management and outbreak control and permit monitoring of disease spread and viral evolution are critical to patient care and public health efforts. As a result, laboratory testing strategies must be developed and optimized in each country. While sophisticated influenza tests are available in specialized laboratories their capacity may be overwhelmed during a pandemic. Point-of-care tests (POCT) or rapid influenza diagnostic tests (RIDT) are available and can be used in remote settings and in physician's offices or clinics without laboratory services. They do not require laboratory equipment and can be performed and interpreted by health-care providers within 5-15 minutes.

This user's guide provides general information on RIDTs and possible applications according to the availability of local epidemiology and influenza laboratory services. In particular, it highlights the limitations of these tests. The aim of this document is to ensure appropriate use and interpretation of the results of RIDTs combined with guidance on good quality planning prior to test deployment so that case management and disease control efforts are optimized.

I. What is influenza?

Influenza is an acute respiratory disease caused by infection with influenza type A and influenza type B viruses. All influenza A viruses are subgrouped on the basis of their surface haemagglutinin (H) and neuraminidase (N) glycoproteins, of which there are 16 known types of H and 9 types of N. The current subtypes of influenza A viruses circulating most widely among humans are A (H1N1) and A(H3N2). Aquatic birds are the primary reservoir for influenza A viruses but they also circulate among other animals including pigs, horses and seals. Humans are the primary reservoir for influenza B viruses.

In humans, both influenza A and B viruses result in seasonal epidemics with winter peaks in temperate zones and year-round circulation in the tropics with rainy season and dry season peaks in activity. Both viruses continually evolve through the accumulation of mutations leading to antigenic drift of the H and N glycoproteins. Influenza A viruses can also evolve through additional mechanisms that allow the emergence of a novel influenza A virus. These can potentially cause a rare influenza pandemic if the novel virus spreads in a sustained manner through largely susceptible populations.

The spectrum of influenza virus infection is wide, ranging from nonfebrile, mild upper respiratory tract illness, febrile influenza-like illness (ILI) to severe or even fatal complications. The greatest burden



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